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## [Bicycle Safety; Respect the Numbers](#)

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*By Christopher Walton, command safety manager, Navy Medicine Professional Development Center*



The U.S. Census Bureau concluded in 2014 that between 2000 and 2012 the number of Americans commuting to work daily on bicycles, not including those who bicycle for recreation, increased from 488,000 to a whopping 786,000.

While on active duty I had the privilege of serving in the Navy as a Chief Hospital Corpsman. Now several years later after my retirement I continue to serve the Navy, but I am no longer wearing a

uniform. Instead I am a civilian, and I serve as a command safety manager.

I really like my job for many reasons but mostly I like it because it still allows me to associate with and take care of Sailors. Nowadays instead of spending my time hiking on a force march or being underway on a ship I focus my thoughts on safety. When it comes to educating people on safety I like to reference numbers and statistics. Usually I look for quick data based on facts that are easy to understand while also providing meaningful impact. Unfortunately, those numbers all too often represented by an actual person who was victim of an unsafe act and paid for it with a severe injury, or even worse, their life.

As the seasons continue to change and summer approaches, more and more people are getting out of the house. I live in Frederick, Maryland, and if your neighborhood is anything like mine you have a lot of bicyclers riding on the local roads. Some are out spending time with their families while others are out for another stringent physical fitness session. Either for fun or fitness it's important to know that bicycling does have inherent hazards worthy of your attention.

The U.S. Census Bureau concluded in 2014 that between 2000 and 2012 the number of Americans commuting to work daily on bicycles, not including those who bicycle for recreation, increased from 488,000 to a whopping 786,000. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration there were 743 bicycle-related fatalities in 2013, and an additional 48,000 bicyclists were injured during motor vehicle traffic accidents. These numbers reflect a 19 percent increase in fatalities since 2010. The average age of those killed in 2013 wasn't 7-, 8- or even 9-years-old. It was 44.

Respect is something that we all learn. I learned about respect early in life from my parents and then later by the Navy. Now as a command safety manager I have learned to respect the numbers and I am hoping you will too. 743 people died, and 48,000 people were injured in bicycle-related accidents in 2013. Let's give that information its due respect by learning from those unfortunate events, and turning those tragedies into valuable data used to save lives.

Here are some bicycle safety reminders from the NHTSA:

- Always wear a properly fitted bicycle helmet.
- Bicyclists, obey traffic signs, signals and lanes markings. Be predictable.

Stop at intersections.

- Drivers, share the road. Allow for 3-feet of clearance when passing a bicyclist. Be careful when opening your door, and be alert when pulling out from a parking space. Be especially watchful when making turns, either right or left, and yield to bicycles in intersections.
- To increase your visibility, wear florescent or brightly colored clothing, use front and rear safety lights, and use other reflective material to include bicycle reflectors when riding at night.

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